

The Amalgamation of the Two Dominican Vicariates¹

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Quite unexpectedly, Hans Brenninkmeijer was appointed vicar provincial of South Africa in 1965. His provincial Frans van Waesberge sent him a letter to this effect.² Of course, several objections could be made against this appointment, van Waesberge conceded. For one, Brenninkmeijer had only just turned thirty-five and would be the youngest vicar provincial ever in the history of the Dutch province of the Dominican Order. Would he nevertheless be willing to consider accepting the appointment, Van Waesberge asked Brenninkmeijer? In his answer of October 1 1965 Brenninkmeijer added to the list of objections his lack of organisational skills, his perfectionism and a need to please everybody that often prevented him from taking clean-cut decisions.

But if you think I can do this, it must be God's will, I believe. So, if you pursue with the appointment after learning of my objections, I will do it and try to make the most of it.³

And so he did, first as vicar provincial (1965-1968), then as vicar general (1968-1976), and finally as bishop of Kroonstad, from April 1977 until his unexpected death in July 2003. Examining the archives of the Dutch province with regard to the South African vicariate it turns out that van Waesberge (1911-1987) personally put his trust in the young Hans Brenninkmeijer, supported by Augustinus van der Meer (1911-1966), then in charge of the Dutch vicariate in South Africa. In this article I attempt to analyse why these two Dominicans unequivocally put their trust in Hans

1. This contribution has benefited from information provided and suggestions made by Bert Robben OP and David van Ooijen OP, for which the author wishes to thank them both cordially.
2. Archives of the Dutch Province (PAOD), personal file Hans Brenninkmeijer. Letter of 26 September 1965.
3. *Ibidem*. Letter to the provincial and diffinitors, 1 October 1965.

Brenninkmeijer. Clearly, he was considered a modern missionary, as well as a builder of bridges, within the community of Dutch Dominicans in South Africa, as well as between them and their friars from the English vicariate.

In the first section the “Dominican biography” of Hans Brenninkmeijer is unravelled. After entering the Order, his individual biography became entwined with the rather complex, collective biography of the Dutch province. Although this province had been entrusted with three missions since 1870, it certainly did not excel in missionary spirit. Being assigned to the Antilles, Puerto Rico or South Africa usually was not considered a privilege among the friars themselves. This is not to say that they lacked apostolic zeal, yet this was concentrated mainly on a broad range of activities within the Netherlands. During his formative years Hans Brenninkmeijer directly or indirectly got acquainted with various Dominican views on the apostolate, that shaped his personal missionary fervour.

Although it certainly remained the poorest mission for a long time, South Africa proved to be the most attractive for young Dutch Dominicans since its start in 1932. In contrast to the Antilles (“too Dutch”) or Puerto Rico (homogenously Catholic), African countries in general embodied both exotic and heroic expectations associated with missionary activity, kindled extensively by missionary propaganda in the Netherlands during the Interbellum. Within the operative framework prescribed by the papal encyclical letters *Maximum Illud* (1919) and *Rerum Ecclesiae* (1926) missionaries were required to implant the Catholic church in designated missionary areas. As I will explain in the second section, observing these guidelines the Dutch Dominican missionaries implanted a parish-based church organisation, European in structure and mentality. Unintentionally – for this was how most, if not all missionaries went about propagating the faith – they ignored to a certain extent existing vast and deep cultural differences between themselves and the local communities they had come to serve. During the fifties of the twentieth century shifting missionary intentions and perspectives started to pave the way for changes in the apostolate of the Dutch Dominicans in South Africa. In their implicit criticism of the existing structures of missionary activities these changes created tensions among the friars, which seemed to come to a head at the

beginning of the sixties. In fact, these tensions were part of the legacy Brenninkmeijer came into in 1965.

This inheritance also comprised deliberations on a more intensive cooperation between the Dutch and the English Dominicans. Attempts in this direction, as is explained in the third section of this article, had been made since right after World War II. In order to be able to fruitfully join forces, differences in spirituality as well as in apostolate had to be overcome. Right after Brenninkmeijer's appointment as vicar provincial the transformation of two existing provincial vicariates into a new, South African vicariate, came into a decisive phase. Brenninkmeijer proved to be a creative, adamant yet also amicable builder of bridges who was able to foster this transformation in troubled times.

Dutch Dominican Grounds

The Dutch province turned out to be one of the strongholds of the Order of the Preachers during the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century. Whereas the Order came close to dying out in most parts of Europe, the *Nederduitse provincie* was able to survive both reformation and revolution in the missionary stations within the Northern Netherlands. The new constitution of 1848 reinstated the Dutch Catholics in their full democratic rights, including that of public worship. This also paved the way for the establishment of the episcopal hierarchy in 1853 – reestablishment as it came to be known in Catholic circles in an attempt to put emphasis on the historical continuity of the Catholic church in the Netherlands.⁴ Dutch Catholics manifested themselves in society more clearly than ever, with clerics and religious of both sexes as a spiritual and organisational vanguard. Faith proved to be a strong impetus to reshape society along confessional lines. Catholic and (orthodox) protestant politicians fully agreed upon this principle for the social, political and cultural organisation of everyday life. The juridical separation of church and state thus amounted to a process that went down in history as *verzuiling* ('pillarisation') and

4. Cf Hans de Valk, "Meer dan een plaats. De keuze van Utrecht als aartsbisdom in 1853", in Jurjen Vis and Wim Janse (eds.), *Staf en storm. Het herstel van de bisschoppelijke hiërarchie in Nederland in 1853: actie en reactie* (Hilversum 2002), pp. 37-63.

that resulted in largely separated and autarchic confessional subcultures (*zuilen*, pillars). This peculiar aspect of the history of Dutch Catholicism would influence its development until approximately 1960.

The evolution of the Dutch Dominican province largely kept its pace with the aforementioned development. The growth of this province enabled the preachers to extend their apostolate beyond the boundaries of the parishes they had cared for ever since the Reformation. In 1870 they entered the missionary field, as the mission of Curaçao, the Dutch colony of the Antilles, was entrusted upon the Dutch Dominicans. In 1904 provincial Ludovicus Theissling, who came to be elected master of the Order in 1916 and remained in office until his death in 1925, accepted the mission of Puerto Rico. His main reason to do so at the time was an excess of manpower.⁵ Having more *fratres* than work proved to be a short-lived luxury, for the apostolate of the Order in the Netherlands branched out in several directions, and quickly absorbed any excess of manpower. Prompted not only by the *verzuiling*, but also by a latent competition between secular and regular clergy, the Dominicans attempted to take on every good work, generating means and vocations for both the church and their own order. They clearly had a mission in their own country, that, in fact, often prevailed upon missionary activities abroad.

Nevertheless, provincial Basilius Schaab (1880-1956) accepted a new mission in South Africa in 1932. Having built a new college for candidates to the priesthood, the Sint Dominicus College in Neerbosch near Nijmegen (1927), as well as an new convent of studies, the Albertinum in Nijmegen (1932), the province had incurred considerable debts. In a time of worldwide economic crisis the provincial had to tread carefully in order not to let this new mission become too much of a financial burden to the province. At the same time he and his advisers probably hoped to capitalise on the missionary zeal that captured Dutch Catholics during the Interbellum and that certainly attracted many new candidates who were interested primarily in a future as a religious missionary. No doubt the adamant

5. Since the secular clergy tended to monopolise the pastoral care in the parishes in the Netherlands, orders and congregations of clerics had to find other suitable forms of apostolate, for example the mission. Th. A.J. Janssen, *De pater op de pastorie: het aandeel van de regulieren in de parochiële zielzorg van Nederland, 1853-1966* (Nijmegen 1976).

requests of his fellow Dutch Dominican Jordanus Gijlswijk (1870-1944), who served as apostolic delegate for South Africa from 1922, added to Schaab's final decision to send out Dutch Dominicans to the prefecture Kroonstad.⁶ The Dutch friars of the Order had already been preceded by the English, who arrived in South Africa in 1917.⁷

Promotional material of the Dominicus College clearly suggests that during the inter-war period the Dutch province clearly intended to profile itself also as a missionary order. Hans Brenninkmeijer entered this college in September 1943. His first years of secondary education in this college were dominated by the Second World War. No doubt the separation from his family during these very insecure years added to the usual anxieties that accompany any boarding school education. Pupils, teaching staff and lay brothers who took care of the internal household arrangements, had evacuated the college in Neerbosch in 1942. They were scattered over several locations in Nijmegen. Together with two other classes Hans Brenninkmeijer's class was relocated to the building of the parochial Catholic youth group of the Maria Geboortekerk (Church of the Birth of the Blessed Virgin). This parish was under the care of the Dominicans, whereas the Dominican Sisters of the Congregation of Saint Catherine of Siena were responsible for the adjacent elementary school. They graciously offered hospitality to the pupils of the college, who therefore could continue their studies. The living conditions were quite crowded and the staff of the college could barely provide for all the students.⁸ This Dominican community was deeply shocked by the death of the youngest teacher of the college Pius de Winter (1914-1944) on 22 February 1944, as the city of Nijmegen was bombed erroneously by Allied forces.⁹ As German authorities claimed more school buildings, Brenninkmeijer's class moved to Drunen right after Easter in 1944. The turmoil of the war drew near after D-day (June 6) in 1944 and made the provincial council eventually

6. Philippe Denis, *The Dominican Friars in Southern Africa. A Social History (1577-1990)* (Leiden, Brill, 1998), pp. 147-164.

7. *Ibidem*, pp. 101-105.

8. PAOD, Diary of Remigius Bruineman, prefect of the college.

9. *Ibidem*. See also the interview with Bert Robben o.p., by Marit Monteiro, 22 August 2002.

decide around September 5¹⁰ to disband school for the forthcoming schoolyear. A wise decision, as it turned out; the military operation Market Garden caused many casualties in and around Nijmegen in September and October of 1944, and added to the diaspora of the Dominicans in the eastern and southern part of the Netherlands. A decision, nevertheless, that also condemned several pupils to months of extreme food scarcity and even hunger in what went down in history as the *Hongerwinter* (winter of hunger) in their hometowns in the western part of the Netherlands.

Classes at the Dominicus College were resumed as soon as August 1945, in an attempt to make up for lost time.¹¹ Hans Brenninkmeijer proved to be a good student, endowed with both intellectual and social talents. He excelled in the subjects German and history, for which he won prizes almost every year.¹² Other than that, there are hardly any traces in the provincial archives of Hans Brenninkmeijer's school career. Like many Dominican students he may have been impressed by some of the teachers.¹³ Among them was Casimirus Terburg (1892-1968), who taught Greek and Latin and who, in certain respects, was considered an unconventional Dominican. He spent almost all of his free time in the caravan camp of Nijmegen, attending to what can be considered an entirely new and rather neglected pastorate, that of the caravan dwellers. Not in the least bit proud of this pioneering pastorate, Terburg always put these pastoral efforts in perspective during his classes in the college. "Have you had any success lately with your work in the caravan camp?" he used to recite a question often put to him, in front of his students, in an ironic tone of voice.¹⁴ "Success" was not the standard by which he measured his pastoral efforts, nor himself, for that matter. This pastorate was worthwhile as an evangelical endeavour to which he, as a Dominican and as a priest, remained deeply committed for more than thirty years, commuting daily between college and camp on a motor cycle. Clearly this pastorate differed from the

10. So-called "Dolle Dinsdag", as the rumour spread that the Allied Forces had reached the Netherlands.

11. Letter of Bert Robben to the author, 11 September 2004.

12. PAOD, Sint Dominicus College Doos X, Cijferlijsten 1892-1953, voorlopige cijfers, gedrag en studieijver 1941-1950.

13. Interview with Bert Robben, by Marit Monteiro, 22 August 2002.

14. Interview with Jan van Amerongen, by Marit Monteiro, 31 January 2003.

intellectual apostolate to which most Dutch Dominicans aspired to. Implicitly, Terburg thus also put his fellow friars and their objectives in perspective. Youngsters like Hans Brenninkmeijer were taught by Dominicans who cherished the traditional privileged and dominant position of the clergy, as well as by friars who gradually started to acknowledge the negative aspects of a unilaterally clerical church. Terburg qualified in the latter category, appreciating the necessity of a more intensified and equal interaction between clergy and laity, in order to bring about a truly Christian society.¹⁵

After completing his novitiate in the convent of Huissen (near Arnhem) in 1951, Hans Brenninkmeijer transferred to the *philosophicum* in the convent of Saint Thomas in Zwolle. Here too his perspective on apostolate, church and priesthood may have been broadened by teachers such as Karel Pauwels (1903-1965). Pauwels became increasingly critical of the splendid isolation of Catholics within their own *zuil*. He encouraged the faithful, as he did his students, to strive for true integration within Dutch society. In order to overcome denominational differences he advocated a more ecumenical approach. During the fifties the convent of Saint Thomas grew into a vital community that embraced various ecumenical opportunities, trying to broaden its horizon beyond the Catholic subculture. For many students the transfer to the Albertinum in Nijmegen put a damper on things, for the study climate and the convent culture proved to be more introverted than in Zwolle. In the *theologicum* classes were divided into two, separate levels:¹⁶ the “moralists” and the “summists”. “Moralists” studied the teaching of moral and dogmatical theology mostly out of secondary sources. They prepared for a pastoral career, either in a parish in the Netherlands or in the mission. “Summists” studied Thomas Aquinas’ *Summa theologica* extensively, in anticipation of complementary studies (*studium completivum*), that often proved to be a stepping stone for a teaching career within the order or at a university.

Although a diligent and good student, there was no doubt among the teachers that Hans Brenninkmeijer was not an academic achiever. The

15. Marit Monteiro, “Mannen van de tijd: maatschappelijke wegen van dominicanen in Nederland (1920-1965)”, in Patrick Chatelion Counet et al. (eds.), *De weg van Dominicus* (Nijmegen 2004, in print).

16. This remained practice until 1962.

path that was carved out for him was that of the “moralists”, for whom the mission always remained an obvious option. Almost half of the candidates that had entered the order in the Dutch province since 1940 had been sent to one of the missions. Changing perspectives on missionary activity, however, induced the provincial council during the fifties to improve the intellectual quality of the missionaries. This is not to say that those who had been sent before lacked intellectual capacities, on the contrary. Still the fact remained that these priests had been trained for the pastoral practice only. Post-war nationalist tendencies in the political spectrum of all three missions, as well as tensions regarding the colonial structure of local societies demanded a new type of missionary. Therefore standard procedures of appointing missionaries came under criticism. For, the missions clearly needed priests who were able to adapt the existing apostolate to changing times and mentalities.

In the mid fifties a definite missionary zeal took hold over young Dominicans like Hans Brenninkmeijer. In a special issue of their own periodical *Vinculum* dedicated to the mission (1956), these young preachers pointed out the missionary origin of the Order, and underscored its missionary charisma.¹⁷ All but one of the contributors to this issue were soon to leave for one of the three missions of the Dutch province. The authors challenged the negative image of mission and missionaries that had prevailed in their province for so long. The mission should no longer be considered a *afvalputje* [drain] for those who could not be put to good use within the Netherlands, they stated.¹⁸ Instead missionary dedication was described as the highest expression of the love of God, as the highly influential French Cardinal Suhard was quoted. Hans Brenninkmeijer, *frater Bonaventura* as he was known then, also contributed to this special issue of *Vinculum*.¹⁹ In his view, missionary activity constituted an essential part of the church as a community of grace [in Dutch: *heil*]. Therefore, each Catholic was obliged to active missionary involvement. Brenninkmeijer clearly considered this a personal obligation for each and

17. PAOD, *Vinculum* XI,4 (1956).

18. Let it be noted that in this very period members of the provincial council nevertheless insisted on keeping “mensen van format” (people of stature) in the Netherlands and not assigning them to the mission. PAOD, Acta provinciaal consilie, 13 March 1958.

19. PAOD, *Vinculum* XI,4 (1956): Fr. Bonaventura, ‘Uw Rijk kome...’

every member of the Catholic church, in the name of Christ and adding to the collective responsibility of the church. "Builders" as well as "building blocks" they had to be, within and on behalf of their church, inspired by the example Jesus Christ had set. Hans Brenninkmeijer not only put this inspiration, proposed by the French Jesuit Henri de Lubac, into words, but eventually into practice as well, proving himself more than willing to live up to this very ideal.

Mission in South Africa

In 1932 the mission of the Dutch Dominicans in South Africa made an extremely modest start. They concentrated exclusively on the pastorate, with stations in the Orange Free State. Some had trouble adjusting to the vast, yet empty territory where outposts of the stations were established.²⁰ The Catholic church in South Africa was predominantly a minority church, populated mostly by black South-Africans. The Dutch Dominicans served as priests both in very poor black parishes without structural sources of income, as well as in a few more affluent white parishes. Financially they depended largely upon their own province and the support of Dominican sisters. By the end of the thirties lack of resources prompted the provincial council to seriously consider discontinuing the South Africa vicariate. Gijlswijk arranged for an exchange of parishes with the English Dominicans. The care for the stations in Potchefstroom, Klerksdorp and Vrijhoek in Transvaal slightly improved the financial basis of the Dutch mission, as did the acceptance of new parishes in the goldfields of the Orange Free State after the war, such as Welkom, Odendaalsrus and Virginia. Looking at photographs, for example, taken in 1947, we see Dominicans dressed in clerical attire for practical reasons, standing in front of rather modest, even improvised churches, surrounded by black people, mostly children.

The racial segregation, legalised in 1948, was a fact of life most Dutch Dominicans complied with, although most of them personally had trouble

20. Cees Veltman, "Bisschop Gerard van Velsen: Jij is die roomse gevaar, zeiden ze", *Hervormd Nederland* 44, 6 (13 februari 1988), p. 7; Reginald Thuijs, "In memoriam Nor Jansen", *Bulletin* 9, 19 (26-12-1974), pp. 91-94, especially, p. 92.

getting used to it. Building a local church, as the Congregation of the Propagation of the Faith visualised, required cooperation with state authorities, or at least not offending them.²¹ Predominant pastoral care for black South Africans made it necessary to learn local languages such as Sesotho.²² Nevertheless, pastoral problems arose when the Sesotho lacked words for specific transgressions. In an interview Gerard van Velsen (1910-1996), Brenninkmeijer's predecessor as bishop of Kroonstad, referred to an incident concerning the fault of superstition. Lacking an equivalent in Sesotho he first had to teach the Bantu the meaning of the Latin word *superstitio*, which they then had to incorporate in their own language, in order to be able to understand why some of their indigenous religious rituals were not in accordance with the Christian, Catholic faith.²³ Such confusion of tongues also casts a rather unfavourable light on the real returns on pastoral investments.

With a predominantly Protestant white population and a government that legally impeded a novitiate or seminary in which white teachers and tutors lived side by side with black pupils,²⁴ the vicariate remained largely dependent on the mother province for manpower. Between 1947 and 1967 thirty-one mostly young Dutch Dominicans arrived in South Africa, in spite of rigorous immigration laws that limited the influx of Catholic priests. Official statistics showed that the Dutch Dominicans attended only to approximately 2.500 white Catholics in the Orange Free State. The more than 20.000 black parishioners in their parishes and outposts were left out of this count.²⁵ One of the new arrivals was Hans Brenninkmeijer. During the year he arrived, 1958, the increasingly tense relationship between the vicar provincial and the bishop of Kroonstad became apparent. Bishop

21. Cf. Denis, *The Dominican Friars*, pp. 239-245.

22. *Ibidem*, p. 119.

23. Katholiek Documentatie Centrum, Nijmegen Collectie KomMissie Memoires, interview no. 546, with mgr. Gerardus Marinus Franciscus van Velsen o.p., by Martin T. Peters, 24 August 1979.

24. As the experiment of a black novitiate at Allingham Farm (1948-1951) sadly illustrated – an initiative that, however, failed for other reasons as well. Cf. Philippe Denis, *The Dominican Friars*, pp. 206-217.

25. PAOD, Correspondentie vicariaat-provinciaal, letter of Egbertus Vermeulen (former vicar provincial in South Africa, but then secretary to the provincial) to Van der Meer, 05 March 1956.

van Velsen's primary intention was to secure the pastoral care within his diocese, organised in parishes. This organisational structure depended entirely upon the cooperation of the Dutch Dominicans. Vicar provincial Augustinus van der Meer (1911-1966), appointed in 1954, could not guarantee full cooperation in this respect for the future. Personally and professionally he strived for more independence from the bishop. Authority came naturally with the job of the vicar provincial, as it came with that of the bishop. And since both men, who were classmates as well, were somewhat hard-headed, their differences of opinion possibly increased latent tensions between diocese and vicariate.

Their arguments, however, referred to a deep-seated problem of missions in general. During the fifties the Holy See made a point of establishing an episcopal hierarchy in vicariates, that had been formerly given 'in commission' to foreign missionary orders and congregations.²⁶ This transformation, meant to endorse the process of worldwide indigenisation of the Catholic church, entailed a shift of power from the missionaries, predominantly diocesan priests, to a diocesan, secular clergy, preferably of indigenous origin. The former missionaries had to redefine and negotiate their objectives and apostolic tasks with the local bishops and the diocesan clergy. Where these bishops largely depended on the missionaries, as was the case in the Kroonstad diocese, these negotiations could be rather complex. Some Dutch Dominicans envisaged the overall withdrawal from the parishes in the more distant future.²⁷ This scenario, first of all, depended upon more manpower. For, in order to be able to extend their apostolate beyond the direct pastoral care in the parishes, more priests were needed.

In the light of his organisational priorities van Velsen could not be party to this scenario of future withdrawal. In fact, he fiercely objected to any project initiated by Dutch Dominicans beyond the limits of his diocese. Van der Meer, on the other hand, reproached the bishop for not recruiting other priests for the Kroonstad diocese, thereby wrecking future

26. This so-called *ius commissionis* was abdicated by the Holy See in 1969, whereupon the position of the original missionary communities of priests and religious shifted anew.

27. As is described by Werenfried (Piet) ten Velde, in "De roeping van de orde in Afrika", *Neerlandia Dominicana* 9 (1954-1955), pp. 135-138.

withdrawal. The bishop maintained that missionary work was not even the calling of the order of the preachers! Thereupon provincial Bonaventura Jansen (1910-1961), a classmate of both van Velsen and van der Meer, advised him to read the life of Saint Dominic once again meticulously.²⁸ In itself this advice illustrated a new awareness among the members of the Dutch provincial council of the missionary character of the order. This new missionary consciousness largely went hand in hand with an increasing mental distance towards the way in which the missions of the province had been organised previously.

Implicitly and tacitly such new visions, as well as the scenario of withdrawal from the parishes, also reflect a growing discomfort concerning apartheid. Systematic racial segregation threatened a regular parochial life on a daily basis. The Group Areas Act (1950) demanded a "relocation" of the black population, whereas the Church Clause of the Native Laws Amendment Act (1957) forbade blacks to attend church ceremonies in areas designated for whites. Among themselves the Dutch Dominicans were divided upon the issue of apartheid. Van der Meer sided with the majority of the English Dominicans, who tried to criticise the unchristian character of the apartheid system in and through their apostolate. Bishop van Velsen, on the other hand, endorsed a piecemeal approach towards apartheid. In his view at that time, black and white merited separate spheres because of inherent different capacities and developmental opportunities.²⁹ This point of view actually came rather close to the official stance the South African government, but was not endorsed by the majority of his fellow Dutch Dominicans in the country. They admired other South Africa bishops, who carefully yet clearly tried to speak out against apartheid, notably Archbishop Denis Hurley of Durban.

28. PAOD, Correspondentie vicariaat-provinciaal, letter from provincial Jansen to van der Meer, 25 April 1957.

29. Van Velsen advocated this viewpoint also during visits to his home country. Cf his address to staff and students of the Theologische Hogeschool of Kampen, *Neerlandia Dominicana* 10 (1955-1956) 71-72. See also Philippe Denis, "South Africa", in: P. Denis (ed.), *Dominicans in Africa. A History of the Dominican Friars in sub-Saharan Africa* (Dublin – Pietermaritzburg, 2003), pp. 85-107, especially pp. 106-107.

Building Bridges

Van der Meer was a staunch supporter of cooperation with the English Dominicans. Intensified cooperation between the vicariates of provinces with a similar, yet also profoundly different, historical development had been contemplated by both the English and the Dutch Dominicans since the end of World War II.³⁰ It was not until the end of the fifties that these deliberations finally seemed to materialise in a joint project. As the English Dominicans were offered the opportunity to take over the diocesan seminary of St Peter's Seminary in Pevensey in 1956, they sounded their Dutch friars out for possible cooperation. It took until 1964 for these plans to take shape, for these entailed an exchange of friars between both vicariates. In 1964 Gerard Meath and Frans van Waesberge, in charge of the English and the Dutch provinces respectively, signed an agreement in Rome concerning a joint effort regarding Saint Peter's Seminary, then moved to Hamanskraal. The master general of the Order, Aniceto Fernandez, considered this cooperation a primary test for an amalgamation between the two vicariates in South Africa. However, difficulties were soon to arise. Whereas the Dutch vicariate was willing to make friars available for the seminary, the willingness among the English Dominicans to take over vacant parishes within the Dutch vicariate was not all too great. Trained in a clearly more monastic tradition, involved in the pastorate, yet not structurally responsible for one or more parishes, they displayed a different attitude towards this singularly parish-oriented apostolate. Moreover they feared practical problems because of their unfamiliarity with the native languages of the black population. Last but not least the plans were held up by Bishop van Velsen. He called upon an agreement with the Dutch provincial council that no Dutch Dominican would be placed outside the Kroonstad diocese without his approval. In 1964 the appointment of Arnold Diephuis (1926-2004), responsible for the parish of Virginia and member of the Dutch province, as vice-rector of the Hamanskraal seminary put

30. Cf Denis, *The Dominican Friars*, pp. 104-105, 109, 124-126, 129-130 and 134. Whereas the Dutch province remained mostly parish-oriented until the sixties, the English province already shifted their main focus of attention from parishes to a supra-parochial form of apostolate at the end of the nineteenth century. They exported this apostolic angle to the mission of South Africa, starting soon with plans for a new house of studies in Stellenbosch, and forms of intellectual apostolate, strongly advocated by provincial Bede Jarrett.

this agreement to the test. Bishop van Velsen won, yet it proved to be a temporary victory.

Although, as mentioned before, van der Meer staunchly advocated close cooperation between the Dutch and the English Dominicans in South Africa, his friars did not consider him to be the right man to facilitate this fundamental organisational change. Among them there seemed to be little support for the continuation of van der Meer as vicar provincial during the provincial chapter of 1960. After an interim period of almost a year, it was decided that he would serve one more term only. In 1965 both he and provincial Frans van Waesberge agreed upon the candidature of Hans Brenninkmeijer, although most of the Dominican missionaries in South Africa would rather have opted for a vicar provincial from outside the South Africa vicariate.³¹ Both the present and the future situation of this vicariate demanded the appointment of a new vicar who was thoroughly acquainted with the South African culture and mentality. Moreover, van Waesberge intended to rejuvenate the administrative structures of the Dutch province, in the Netherlands as well as in the missions. In many respects Brenninkmeijer seemed a very suitable candidate. Reputably he was a man of the *aggiornamento* the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) had advocated. Moreover he proved to be able to build bridges within his own community of Dutch Dominicans, as well as between the Dutch and the English friars in South Africa, anticipating a self-supporting South Africa vicariate within the order.

Aided by the moral, financial, and spiritual support of both provincials the Irish Dominican Mannes Cussen paved the way for this new vicariate between 1965 and 1968, on the order of Fernandez.³² With the master's confirmation of the election of its first superior, the new general vicariate of South Africa came into being on 27 February 1968. Five days earlier Brenninkmeijer had been elected as superior by the friars of the new vicariate, who had been authorised to chose the new vicar general from their midst.³³ Over fifty Dominicans participated in this election, that was

31. PAOD, Acta provinciaal consilie, 24 March 1965.

32. *Ibidem*, Doos Correspondentie Zuid-Afrika, map Correspondentie Zuid-Afrika met Provinciaalaat, 1968-1972, letter from Cussen to Van Waesberge, 22 March 1968.

33. In fact, the master of the Order was not willing to approve the election of a friar who did not reside in South Africa at that time.

held at La Verna Retreat Centre, Vanderbijlpark. A lively picture taken during this election appeared in the edition of *The Southern Cross* of Wednesday 13 March 1968. In vain one seeks Hans Brenninkmeijer in this picture. His election and even more so his re-election in 1972 proved the point van der Meer had already made in 1956: the English would have less trouble accepting a Dutch superior than the other way around.³⁴ Perhaps van der Meer attempted to qualify for the job himself, perhaps he referred to certain national Dominican idiosyncrasies and sensibilities, that Brenninkmeijer certainly could and did not neglect during his first years in office. Dutch and English Dominicans differed, as they were the first to admit themselves: in apostolic orientation and in the organisation of their daily life. With the English a clear monastic orientation seemed to prevail, whereas the life of their Dutch friars seemed to revolve solely around the parishes they attended to. Of course, this juxtaposition is oversimplified. Nevertheless, such qualifications were coined in Dominican circles in 1965 as the process of amalgamation of the two vicariates started to take a clear shape.³⁵ Such true or alleged differences quickly shrank into insignificance compared to the conviction that the time was right for the aspired amalgamation.³⁶ Clearly though, a superior was needed who would not make too much of an issue of differences, without neglecting or underestimating them.

Hans Brenninkmeijer proved to be the right man for this task. He successfully attempted to strengthen internal unity among the friars by pointing out what they had in common, instead of what divided them. He was well aware of the complexity of the new status of the South African vicariate. He conscientiously safeguarded the future right of the members of the vicariate to elect their own vicar, as he did care to honour the right of consultation of both the Dutch and the English provincial before any

34. PAOD, Correspondentie vicariaat-provincialaat, letter from Van der Meer to provincial Jansen, 15 September 1956.

35. *Ibidem*, Zuid-Afrika doos I, Historie Vicariaat, Map Vicariaat van Zuid-Afrika, memorandum written by Damian McGrath o.p. (1965, written on a personal account); *ibidem*, map Diverse rapporten o.p., mededelingen en berichten e.d. (1945-1985), 'Some personal impressions of Stellenbosch by a Dutch Dominican' (signed fr. Jos. D. Gomes O.P., dated (in pencil) 1965).

36. PAOD, Doos Correspondentie Zuid-Afrika, map Correspondentie Zuid-Afrika met Provinciaal, 1968-1972, letter from Cussen to Van Waesberge, 22 March 1968. Cf. interview with Arnold Diephuis o.p., by Marit Monteiro, 11 April 2002.

candidate elect was confirmed by the master of the order. "Keep your fingers crossed", he wrote on the copy of the announcement of the foundation of the new vicariate and the election of its administrators, sent to his provincial in the Netherlands. Brenninkmeijer's intuition to go about slowly in attempting to change things, turned out to a wise one.³⁷ Nevertheless, he encountered manifold difficulties. The development of the new vicariate seemed to mirror that of most Dominican provinces in Western Europe, especially in the Netherlands. During his first term of four years sixteen priests, two lay-brothers and four students left the Order. Moreover, there were hardly any new vocations. Within a few years the manpower of the new vicariate was reduced by more than 30%. 1970 especially was not a very good year: ten priests from the vicariate left; the unexpected death of Benedict van der Meer, that affected Brenninkmeijer deeply, for his predecessor had been a cornerstone in the provincial council and an inspiring example of dedication and faith to him personally. Moreover, quite a few other friars suffered from serious health problems. Were these problems in any way related to tensions among the friars, disappointments on a personal level or too large a workload for the Dominicans in general, Brenninkmeijer critically asked himself? Did God at all want this amalgamation to work, was the question he put to himself, as well as to his provincial.³⁸

This (self)critical and deeply caring side of himself remained partly hidden behind his sensitive humour, his occasional roars of laughter and his unremitting optimism which his brothers appreciated so very much. Transforming the new vicariate into a unified new Dominican entity, geared to a transformation of a politically and socially highly complex local context, required exactly what Hans Brenninkmeijer originally formulated as his personal missionary ideal: being a "builder" and a "building block" at the same time, being able to lead and to be led, in the name of Jesus Christ and the better world He envisaged, along the path Saint Dominic had laid down for his followers, in the light of changing times.

37. PAOD, Doos Correspondentie Zuid-Afrika, map Correspondentie Zuid-Afrika met Provinciaalstaat, 1968-1972, Brenninkmeijer to provincial Van Waesberge, d.d. 05-04-1968.

38. *Ibidem*, letters of Brenninkmeijer to provincial Van Waesberge, d.d. 14-09-1970 and 21-11-1970.